

Message Text

SECRET

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40

ACTION EA-13

INFO OCT-01 SS-15 ISO-00 DPW-01 SSO-00 NSC-10 NSCE-00

CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 RSC-01 DODE-00 AID-10 USIA-04

PRS-01 DRC-01 /067 W

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P R 181130Z SEP 73

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7199

INFO USDEL JEC PARIS

S E C R E T SAIGON 16595

LIMDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PINT VS

SUBJ: NUMBERS OF "POLITICAL PRISONERS" IN SOUTH VIETNAM

REF: STATE 184534

1. REFTEL GAVE TEXT OF SEYMOUR HERSH ARTICLE DATED
SEPTEMBER 15 ON U.S. ASSISTANCE TO GVN POLICE. THE
FOLLOWING ARE OUR FIGURES ON NUMBERS OF PRISONERS.

TOTAL NUMBER OF PRISONERS

2. AS OF DECEMBER 31, 1972, WE HAD INFORMATION FROM OUR
PUBLIC SAFETY ADVISERS THAT 39,657 INMATES OF ALL TYPES WERE
IN THE NATIONAL AND PROVINCIAL PRISONS, AND THAT AN
ADDITIONAL 4,060 WERE UNDER TEMPORARY POLICE DETENTION.

3. OUR UNDERSTANDING HAS BEEN THAT PRISON POPULATION DECLINED
STEADILY DURING 1973 BECAUSE OF PRISONER EXCHANGES WITH THE
COMMUNISTS AND SEVERAL MAJOR AMNESTIES. TO DOUBLE CHECK OUR
CURRENT ESTIMATES, HOWEVER, OSA LAST MONTH OBTAINED INFORMATION
ON THE CORRECTION AND DETENTION SYSTEMS AS OF JULY 24, 1973.

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4. OSA'S DATA ON THE CORRECTION SYSTEM CAN BE SUMMARIZED AS

FOLLOWS:

CATEGORY OF PRISONERS OCCUPANCY AS OF JULY 24

INMATES OF NATIONAL PRISONS	15,595
INMATES OF PROVINCIAL PRISONS	14,038
COMMUNIST OFFENDERS (AT OTHER LOCATIONS)	3,506
	33,139

IN ADDITION, OSA OBTAINED PARTIAL DATA ON THE TEMPORARY DETENTION FACILITIES, AS OF AUGUST 22, 1973. IT SHOWED 314 PERSONS HELD AT CENTERS IN THE SAIGON AREA. THE OSA FIGURES LEAD TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THE TOTAL DETENTION POPULATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM MAY BE ABOUT ONE THOUSAND. ALTOGETHER, THEREFORE, THE CORRECTION AND DETENTION SYSTEM IN THE JULY-AUGUST PERIOD CAN BE RELIABLY ESTIMATED AT LESS THAN 35,000. THIS INCLUDES ALL CATEGORIES OF CIVILIAN PRISONERS, NOT JUST "POLITICAL PRISONERS" HOWEVER DEFINED.

NUMBER OF "POLITICAL PRISONERS"

5. DEPARTMENT HAS USED EMBASSY ESTIMATE OF APRIL 1973 OF 500 TO 1,000 POLITICAL PRISONERS. THIS FIGURE WAS ROUGH ESTIMATE WITHOUT VERIFIABLE BASIS AS BOTH EMBASSY AND DEPARTMENT HAVE EMPHASIZED. THERE ARE INFINITE PROBLEMS OF DEFINING "POLITICAL PRISONER." IN FACT AND UNDER ANY DEFINITION, WE SIMPLY DO NOT KNOW HOW MANY SUCH PRISONERS THERE ARE, BUT NETHER DO CRITICS WHO USE PATENTLY EXAGGERATED FIGURES. APPLING

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NNN

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